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ABSTRACT

This report presents lessons learned from the National Partnership for Reinventing Government (NPR) and offers advice for state and local reinvention efforts, describing how NPR's leaders built political and public support and focusing on five aspects of reinvention: getting started (e.g.; creating a reinvention team, building relationships with the central budget and management agency, creating reinvention labs, using stories and measurements to build support, focusing on customers, and creating a sense of urgency); unleashing untapped human potential (e.g., recognizing good ideas that save money, moving decision making into the field, giving workers the tools they need to do their jobs, enhancing the quality of work life, and building performance partnerships); using benchmarks to improve government processes (employee work groups and surveys, performance measures, and one-stop customer service); using information technology to transform governance (government online rather than in line, user-friendly interfaces, Internet applications, and using the power of place to build support for change); and moving to balanced measures to assess results in terms of achieving agencies' missions and satisfying customers and employees. (Contains 71 endnotes.) (SM)

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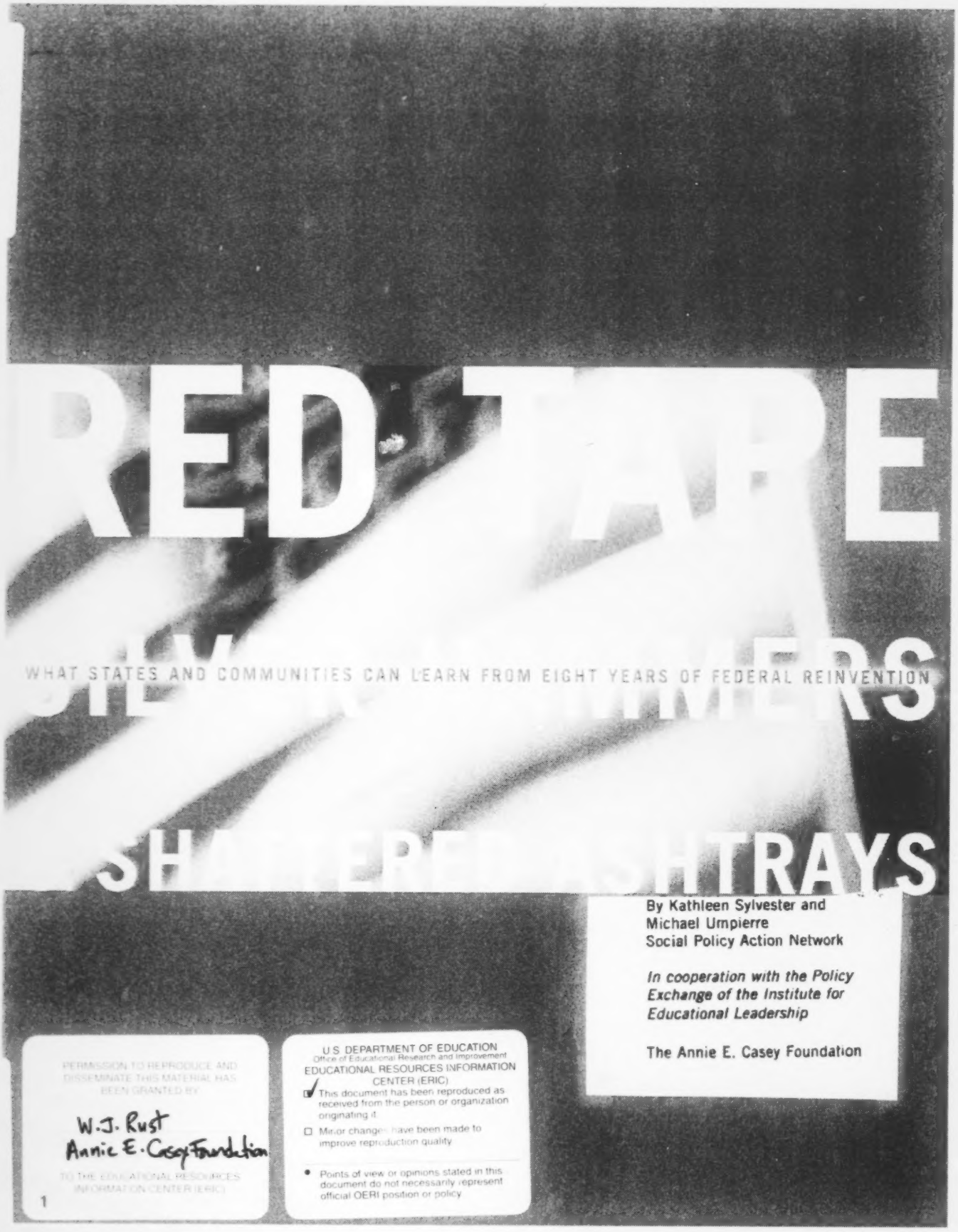

RED TAPE

WHAT STATES AND COMMUNITIES CAN LEARN FROM EIGHT YEARS OF FEDERAL REINVENTION

SHARPER FINGERTRAYS

By Kathleen Sylvester and
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Social Policy Action Network

In cooperation with the Policy Exchange of the Institute for Educational Leadership

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

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INTRODUCTION

One legacy of the Clinton administration was its eight-year effort for "creating a government that works better, costs less, and gets results Americans care about."[1] Although the National Partnership for Reinventing Government—or NPR—did not achieve all of its ambitious goals, it did significantly reduce the size of the federal workforce, cut administrative costs, use information technology to improve government interactions with citizens, and reform the procurement system.[2] NPR also changed the culture of some agencies—and the relationship of the federal government to its own employees—by measuring the agencies against new kinds of standards, some set by workers themselves and some adapted from the private sector. Finally, NPR changed relationships with state and local governments by treating them as full partners in producing results for the citizens they serve in common.

State and local governments can learn a great deal from the history of NPR—both from its successes and from its shortcomings. This report harvests the lessons and offers advice for state and local reinvention efforts. It focuses on five important aspects of reinvention: getting started, unleashing untapped human potential, using benchmarks to improve government processes, using information technology to transform governance, and moving to balanced measures to assess results in terms of achieving agencies' missions and satisfying customers and employees.

OVERVIEW

In 1993, the National Partnership for Reinventing Government (generally called NPR and formerly the National Performance Review) was born. Its mission: Creating a government that works better, costs less, and gets results Americans care about.

NPR was the tenth attempt in the 20th century to reform the federal government. All the earlier efforts —including those of the 1937 Brownlow Commission, the 1949 Hoover Commission, and the 1983 Grace Commission—had used the same basic formula to engineer reform: Declare a crisis. Bring in the experts. Study the problem for a limited time. Issue a report. Declare success. Disband.

Few observers expected NPR to be different. NPR *was* different, however, right from the start because it was led by Vice President Al Gore. NPR's leaders used a new set of strategies, many of them inspired by successful state efforts such as the Texas Performance Review, Minnesota's Strive Toward Excellence in Performance (STEP), and Oregon's Benchmarks. Local successes in cities like Sunnyvale, California, and Hampton, Virginia, also served as models. NPR's leaders focused less on what government should do and more on how government should work. Former NPR Deputy Director John Kamensky says that instead of taking the classic approach of reorganizing government, NPR "tried to fix what's inside the 'boxes' rather than spending time and political energy trying to move the 'boxes.'"

James R. Thompson wrote in a 2000 article in the *American Review of Public Administration*, "More than prior executive branch reform initiatives, NPR is directed at effecting change in the 'core technologies' of agencies and hence in the behaviors of rank-and-file government employees."[1]

The effort focused on what could be accomplished through executive authority as well as by legislative action. And Vice President Gore also imposed one important rule: There would be no recommendations for further study.

For eight years, beginning in 1993, NPR would review the specific and the general—from assessing the effectiveness of individual agencies and their unique functions to rethinking government systems such as procurement and personnel. It would examine how government functioned in its central offices and in the field in what NPR officials called "reinvention labs." It would look to the private sector for innovations, such as benchmarking tools, and adopt a strong focus on customer service—a mindset rarely associated with bureaucracies. It would look to the future of public administration with advances in electronic government and decentralized control.

NPR's reported accomplishments included cutting the federal civilian workforce by 426,000 and recommending to Congress about $177 billion in savings—of which Congress approved $136 billion.

NPR'S MISSION: Creating a government that WORKS BETTER, COSTS LESS, and GETS RESULTS Americans care about.

Although a 1999 U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) report* concluded that these savings could not be credited solely to NPR, most agree that the initiative deserves a significant portion of the credit.

President Bill Clinton signed 50 directives and Congress passed more than 90 laws aimed at streamlining government operations. NPR also changed the relationship between the federal government and many state and local governments by implementing flexible performance agreements in place of restrictive-grant programs.* And finally—in the case of many agencies and departments of government—NPR profoundly changed both the way government workers view their jobs and the way citizens view their government.

It is important to say what NPR did not accomplish. It did not build a strong rapport with Congress. Results in the federal agencies were uneven: Some embraced reinvention; others chose largely to ignore NPR. For the most part, NPR's savings were not reinvested in efforts such as new technology and training; instead, they were spent on programs that the administration considered more politically popular. And NPR did not achieve its goal of revamping the civil service—the one reform that would have had the greatest influence on government effectiveness and efficiency.

Given these successes and shortcomings, the eight-year effort yielded some important lessons for state and local governments that seek to reinvent their own public agencies. Just as NPR looked to state reinvention initiatives for inspiration and cautionary tales, states and communities can look to NPR's example for guidance on what to do—and what not to do—as they seek to make their own governments more efficient and responsive to citizens.

In this chapter:

- Creating a reinvention team
- Building relationships with the central budget and management agency
- Reaching for low-hanging fruit
- Starting with the high readies
- Creating reinvention labs
- Using stories and measurements to build support
- Focusing on customers
- Learning from the private sector
- Creating a sense of urgency
- Pushing for legislative support

Creating a Reinvention Team

The NPR model was straightforward. Rather than bringing in outside experts, Vice President Gore insisted on using federal workers themselves, saying that the problem was the system, not the people in it, and that he trusted people in government to lead the reinvention effort and fix the system. The idea was based in part on the success of the Texas Performance Review, which had produced a reported $2.4 billion in savings using suggestions from state workers.[4] Billy Hamilton is the deputy comptroller of Texas. He also runs the Texas Performance Review, and he worked on NPR. Hamilton says Gore's decision to eschew outside experts was the right one: "Consultants have a role, but they don't have intimate knowledge of how the agencies work. They just come in with a bag of tricks and try to make them fit."

The original NPR staff consisted of an interagency task force of 250 career civil servants, a few state and local government employees who were experts on reinvention in their own jurisdictions, and some consultants. The staff was divided into teams—some focused on reviewing individual federal agencies, others focused on government systems such as procurement and personnel.

Recruiting the right people was crucial. The effort was staffed by volunteers from federal agencies who remained on their own agencies' payrolls. But NPR staffers were chosen by NPR's leaders to ensure that agencies could not dump unwanted employees. NPR veterans, including John Kamensky and former Deputy Director Beverly Godwin, suggest that using workers on loan from their agencies—and not being required to pay their salaries—worked to NPR's benefit. To begin with, it meant that NPR did not have a large operating budget that opponents of reinvention could seek to undermine. And the notion that NPR was staffed by an elite corps of volunteers—some of the brightest in government—gave credibility to the effort.

An immediate question arises about recruiting: How could agency and department heads be convinced to part with talented workers, even for a short time? One way, suggest the NPR veterans, was to include supervisors in meetings to keep them apprised of ideas coming from the reinvention effort and to remind them constantly that their loaned employees would return to the agencies full of new ideas.

How could agency and department heads be CONVINCED TO PART WITH TALENTED WORKERS, even for a short time?

It was also important that the invitation came from the vice president. Says Hamilton, "If you can get a commitment from someone of high enough stature, the frontline workers will rally around the flag—and they know the problems." There is another strategic advantage. When such a reform effort is spearheaded by an elected official, says Hamilton, "agency heads can implement needed reforms and then blame it on the elected official."

Robert Knisely, another NPR veteran, suggests a slight variation in the formula for staffing a state or local government reinvention effort. Knisely suggests adding people with "different rhythms" to promote fresh discussions about improving the public sector. He suggests a mix of current employees, retirees with long years of government experience, and university-sponsored researchers.

Adds Pamela Johnson, former NPR deputy director: "Two groups were invaluable to NPR—interns and folks on the brink of retirement. Interns saw everything in a new light and networked tirelessly. A number of the people who were about to leave government were fearless. They had years of experience, they knew the problems, and had nothing to lose by proposing change."

Building Relationships with the Central Budget and Management Agency

When states and communities begin reinvention, Kamensky recommends that they keep their efforts separate from their traditional management agencies. "Management," he notes, "needs to create order out of chaos . . . [Management needs] people who say no." A reinvention effort, he suggests, "needs people who say go." In NPR's case, the initiative was independent of the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the executive branch's management agency.

Bob Stone, a Pentagon veteran who was NPR's first director, makes an additional point. He agrees that it was important to keep the effort separate from OMB, but he says it's equally important to maintain a harmonious relationship with the budget agency. "I would advise governors to make sure that their budget office is supportive. They know where money is available."

One innovation that built strong relations between NPR and OMB was the President's Management Council (PMC), the creation of which was among the first NPR recommendations to be adopted by the president. It brought together high-ranking political appointees, designated as "chief operating officers," from each federal department and from selected major agencies for regular discussions about management and reinvention efforts. The head of NPR sat on the council, but it was chaired by OMB's deputy director for management. This arrangement gave OMB a stake in reinvention, and it ensured that the top leaders of the executive branch were focusing on management reform.

PMC became a critical force in planning and implementing mandated workforce reductions and in using balanced measures, harnessing information technology to create an electronic government, and coordinating the federal response to the Y2K computer bug.

Reaching for Low-Hanging Fruit

One serious problem reinventors face is skepticism—from the public, from politicians, and from government workers themselves. The public and politicians have seen many reform efforts come and go with little effect. Government workers have outlasted many more.

Although it took NPR nearly eight years to achieve some of its more important reforms, NPR staff members were keenly aware that they needed to build credibility quickly. As Godwin puts it, "Acknowledging that [reinvention] is a long-term change is important, but you still need short-term wins to make sure people play."

By achieving the easily achievable, a reinvention team gains momentum, both internally and in the public view. For NPR, this meant making government cost less by coming up with recommendations for savings that added up to $108 billion and a plan to eliminate 252,000 federal jobs through attrition.*

These sizable recommendations did two things. First, they grabbed headlines, which helped generate public attention for the effort. Second, Texas's Billy Hamilton says, the cuts were necessary to build credibility. "You can't just do a regular review and cut 5 percent from each department; you have to put some blood on the sidewalk and make them afraid of you," he asserts. Making government cost less was the achievement that allowed the reinventors the time to make government work better, which was the more important goal.

Starting with the High Readies

Because of the importance of reinventing all of the federal government, NPR attempted to focus on all agencies from the start. The vice president obtained promises from cabinet members to make reinvention a priority and to assign top department officials to guide the project. Some cabinet members and agency heads were receptive; others were less so. Kamensky advises state and local reinventors to start with what he calls the "high readies"—the leaders who are eager to begin—and then lavish attention on their agencies. He suggests that when the high readies start producing results, other agencies will be encouraged to become involved.

Because of the importance of reinventing all of the federal government, NPR ATTEMPTED TO FOCUS ON ALL AGENCIES from the start. The vice president obtained promises from cabinet members to MAKE REINVENTION A PRIORITY and to assign top department officials to guide the project. Some cabinet members and agency heads were receptive; others were less so.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency was one such agency. When James Lee Witt took over FEMA in 1993, he described his employees as "terrific people who weren't producing because they weren't being led." He believed that a culture change was in order. A sign on his desk signaled his seriousness: "When entering this room, don't say, 'We've never done it that way before.'"[9]

Creating Reinvention Labs

Even if government agencies as a whole aren't ready to reinvent, programs or organizations within those agencies could be. In 1993, Vice President Gore asked the head of each federal agency to "designate two or three programs or units to be laboratories for reinventing government. . . . The point is to pick a few places where we can immediately unshackle our workers so they can re-engineer their work processes to fully accomplish their missions—places where we can fully delegate authority and responsibility, replace regulations with incentives, and measure our success by customer satisfaction."[10]

Five years later, 325 federal organizations had become reinvention labs. NPR worked with the agencies to cut red tape and put administrative waivers in place that would let those agencies enact reforms quickly. The reinvention labs became the vanguard of the federal reinvention effort, testing new approaches for improving customer service and performance.

A 1996 GAO evaluation found that the labs had "improved service, productivity, and employee morale."[11] For example, the U.S. Department of Energy's reinvention lab, located at the Hanford nuclear site in Washington state, saved $29 million over five years by reforming the installation's security operations. The Defense Logistics Agency lab reduced the agency's pharmaceutical inventories by $48.6 million and spurred other Department of Defense medical facilities to make similar reductions.[12]

Using Stories and Measurements to Build Support

Quantitative results that illustrate progress are important for any reinvention effort. But such results can take years to become apparent. In the meantime, state and local reinventors can follow NPR's example of spreading the word about individual successes that show reinvention making a difference in how the government does business. Or, as Kamensky puts it, leading with symbols—not directives.

The first NPR report, *From Red Tape to Results: Creating a Government That Works Better and Costs Less*,[13] was highly anecdotal. The report was well received by the public and the media because it explained—in very plain language—some of the obstacles that prevented federal employees from working effectively. It included such often-repeated stories as the vice president's tale—shared with David Letterman's late night television audience—about a federal procurement rule specifying that government-purchased ashtrays should break into no more than 35 pieces when subjected to pressure.

But the report also included 384 recommendations; accompanying

agency reports included hundreds more. What was most important about these recommendations was that they were specific enough to enact. The following are examples of recommendations from the *Red Tape* report.

QUAL 01 Provide Improved Leadership and Management of the Executive Branch

The President should define a vision for the management of the government in the 21st century. To act on this vision, he should direct department and agency heads to designate chief operating officers and he should establish a President's Management Council, comprised of the chief operating officers, to oversee the implementation of NPR's recommendations.[14]

HRM12 Eliminate Excessive Red Tape and Automate Functions and Information

Phase out the entire 10,000-page Federal Personnel Manual (FPM) and all agency implementing directives by December 1994. Replace the FPM and agency directives with automated personnel processes, electronic decision support systems and "manuals" tailored to user needs.[15]

The next report, *Creating a Government That Works Better and Costs Less: Status Report*,[16] was full of stories too—stories of early success. "Even when it was too soon for measurable results," recalls John Kamensky, "Bob Stone told us to go out and find 'raving fans of government' and let them tell their stories." One story in the 1994 report came from a laid-off Boeing worker who said the U.S. Department of Labor crisis hotline not only kept her from panicking when she lost her job, but that its counselors helped her find a new one quickly.

Focusing on Customers

A fundamental operating strategy of NPR was this: If you don't know whether something is working, ask your customers. Says Johnson: "One important lesson NPR has to share with state and local government is that focusing on customers is fundamental. We found that focusing on customers is the surest, fastest way to find out where change is needed and what needs fixing."

NPR's efforts focused first on reforming the agencies that had the most contact with the public. Following the example of the private sector, one of NPR's first tasks was to create customer service standards for such agencies as the U.S. Postal Service and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The vice president held a summit with business leaders in June 1993 in Philadelphia to learn about customer satisfaction strategies used in the private sector by Disney and other corporate giants.

In September 1993, the president issued Executive Order 12862,[17] requiring the standard of quality for services provided to the public to be "equal to the best in business." The order required all executive departments and agencies to survey their customers to determine what kind and quality of services the public wanted and to assess public satisfaction with those services.

THE HARDEST PART was convincing some government agencies that they have customers.

Former NPR official Susan Valaskovic says the hardest part was convincing some government agencies that they have customers. Many, like the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, had argued for years that they did not. But in fact, 1.4 million of 1.7 million civil service employees—including those in who work in veterans' hospitals, the U.S. Park Service, the Social Security Administration (SSA), and the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)—have direct contact with members of the public.

NPR stressed the importance of listening to people who receive agency services, rather than presuming their desires. Vice President Gore urged, "Please do not skip this step. Don't assume you know what your customers want." As he predicted, there were some surprises. For instance, IRS was surprised to learn what its customers wanted: as little contact with IRS as possible. After discovering this, the agency developed an automated phone system that allows taxpayers to complete many transactions without speaking directly to agents. One result? IRS put an increased priority on enabling taxpayers to file electronically; 40 million taxpayers now use that service.

IRS found it inaccurately assessed customer demand in other areas as well. For years, it sent federal tax forms directly to American homes four months before the April 15 filing deadline. The agency believed that people appreciated receiving the forms in the mail rather than having to go out to pick them up. What it failed to recognize, however, was that a substantial percentage of Americans rely on professional tax preparers, so each year, millions of tax forms were thrown away. IRS now mails forms only to taxpayers who have prepared their own returns in past years.

Like many other agencies, IRS also has made an effort to change its unfriendly public image. Its newly revamped website, www.irs.gov, is an easy-to-read tabloid called the Digital Daily that features colorful images and snappy design. The site's content is laced with humor. For example, one page is entitled "Tax Regs in Plain English. We've Summed It Up So You Won't Have to Deal with All the Legal Jargon."

In 1997, NPR recognized that 32 federal agencies have 90 percent of the federal government's contact with the public. These were designated high-impact agencies, and each was directed to list its customer service goals on a single page and make a commitment to the vice president that the goals would be achieved by the end of the last full fiscal year of the Clinton administration.

IRS promised 24-hour, 7-day customer telephone service during tax season; the U.S. Postal Service promised to deliver first-class mail overnight in local areas 92 percent of the time; and the Office of Student Financial Assistance Programs in the Department of

Education promised that 3 million college students who apply for federally subsidized loans would be able to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid online. All of these agencies fulfilled their promises.

Once agency personnel were convinced that they indeed had customers, Valaskovic says the next tasks were to provide customer service training and to help agencies gauge customer satisfaction. In 1998, NPR used the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), at www.customersurvey.gov/acsiindex.htm, to survey 30 customer segments of 29 federal agencies. Produced by a partnership of the University of Michigan Business School, the American Society for Quality, and Arthur Andersen Consulting, ACSI initially was established as an economic indicator of customer satisfaction with quality. For NPR, the index was expanded to measure a broader range of services in 30 federal agencies. Those efforts continue in the Bush administration.[18]

The study produced interesting results. In general, it showed that citizens find some of the government's performance "comparable to the best in the business." Such programs as Head Start and WIC (the Women, Infants, and Children nutrition program) scored particularly well. Satisfaction was highest among customers of agencies that provide services or benefits directly to the public, such as SSA and the U.S. Mint, and it was lowest for regulatory agencies, such as the Federal Aviation Administration and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.[19]

As Valaskovic points out, NPR didn't have to invent customer satisfaction surveys. Neither do state and local governments. The ACSI surveys, she says, can be adapted for the public sector. And, she notes, "The results tell agencies precisely what they must do to improve customer service." At the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, for example, customer satisfaction rose significantly after employees began to leave voice mail announcements informing callers when they would be away from the office for extended periods.

The U.S. Mint also acted directly on ACSI findings. After Mint officials found that their customers were dissatisfied with the time it took to receive mail orders for coins and coin-based jewelry, the agency developed the Consolidated Information System, or COINS, which combined financial, manufacturing, and distribution data and systems. At one time, it took the Mint an average of eight weeks to fill mail orders; now, the Mint delivers 95 percent of its

Private industry generally works outside the public's vision, but public administration is subject to MEDIA SCRUTINY. And where managers in private-sector organizations have complete discretion over business decisions, public administrators must report NOT ONLY to their superiors but also to legislatures and the courts.

orders within two weeks.[20] In NPR's 2000 customer satisfaction survey the Mint received the second highest score among 30 government agencies.

Learning from the Private Sector

In some previous government reform efforts, leaders began with the presumption that government should operate like a business; in other efforts, reformers rejected that idea. As James Fesler and Donald Kettl point out in their 1996 book *The Politics of the Administrative Process*,[21] the private sector can measure its performance against the market, but few public-sector organizations can directly evaluate outputs in relation to the cost of the inputs used to make them. Private industry generally works outside the public's vision, but public administration is subject to media scrutiny. And where managers in private-sector organizations have complete discretion over business decisions, public administrators must report not only to their superiors but also to legislatures and the courts.

And as Kettl noted in a 1998 article in *Government Executive*,[22] there is a fundamental mismatch between government's formal structures and processes and the realities of what government does and how it does it. Most government business is conducted by private contractors, through grants to state and local governments, and in the tax code.

Morley Winograd, who served as NPR's second director, points out that only a handful of government agencies can be compared with businesses and measured accurately for productivity gains. "The U.S. Mint is literally a factory operation," says Winograd, "but in agencies where the goals are to produce social and economic benefits to citizens, measuring productivity is a little bit of a stretch."

NPR sought a compromise between competing visions of government. The initiative started with the idea that the public sector, although different, can still learn from the private sector. Notes NPR's Knisely, "NPR is one of a precious few attempts by the public sector to find what works in the private sector."

In the summer of 1993, at an NPR summit in Philadelphia, business leaders offered lessons from their own corporations. Wal-Mart executives taught the secrets of inventory control; GE taught cutting headquarters as a way of empowering the front line. Top executives from Cadillac, Ritz-Carlton, The Limited, Motorola, Southwest Airlines, and Saturn all repeated the same message to government agencies: Put customers first.

For NPR, the private sector inspired the creation and use of balanced measures, customer and employee satisfaction standards, and information technology in the public sector. Yet NPR veterans still emphasize the need for a simpler way for the sectors to learn from each other. As Robert Knisely puts it, "Right now, there is no place in government for some sort of mediated discussion between the private and public sector. No one is

trying to find what works in one environment and implement it in another."

Creating a Sense of Urgency

President Clinton announced the reinvention effort in March 1993. The date set for release of the first NPR report was September 7, 1993. The administration was serious about the deadline: Six months. No extensions. "One of the most important things that created success was the sense of urgency. ... It's got to be there to get [a reinvention movement] off the ground," recalls Kamensky. Adds former NPR director Stone, "We had six months. If we had had 12 to 18 months, we wouldn't have done as much because proponents wouldn't have had the energy to sustain their pace, and adversaries would have had time to gear up."

Texas's Billy Hamilton agrees: "The window of opportunity opens and closes quickly. If you don't take advantage of that, you will come to rue the day when you can't get things done." The first Texas Performance Review, he noted, lasted just five months. In contrast, the previous Texas reform effort, under the Thomas Commission, took years and went agency by agency.

Furthermore, Gore had announced that, "where possible, recommendations [were to] be administrative changes, not proposals requiring statutory changes—and that recommendations for 'further studies' were not acceptable."[23]

Pushing for Legislative Support

Earlier government reform efforts, such as that of the Grace Commission, had framed their recommendations as legislative proposals. NPR did not. Over its lifespan, NPR offered most of its recommendations as administrative orders for the president, rather than as legislative action for Congress. But a reform effort initiated by the executive branch cannot function without legislative support. Although the rhetoric of reinvention is often sweeping and high flown, as Hamilton points out, "the success of 75 to 80 percent of what we propose depends on how well it fits with what the legislature wants."

For NPR, legislative support was important. The passage of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) in 1993 helped NPR enormously. GPRA was initiated before NPR began. And in addition to having Vice President Gore's strong support, the legislation was championed in the Senate by William Roth (R-Delaware) and John Glenn (D-Ohio).

The law requires agencies to develop strategic plans describing overall goals and objectives and to match the plans with quantifiable performance. Observers agree that without GPRA, few agencies would have taken the NPR mission seriously. As NPR's Godwin notes, "legislation gets every agency thinking they have to do it and do it right."

Once GPRA was in place, NPR worked with Congress to pass other legislation to improve the way government did business. The goals were to allow agencies to reduce the

Make sure that you provide the legislature with DETAILS OF HOW THINGS GET DONE. Be rigorous.

size of the workforce (by offering bonuses for employees leaving government service voluntarily) and to simplify procurement. Without legislation to guide—and even coerce—agencies to change, the bureaucracies would simply outlast the administration and its reform effort.

Hamilton's advice: "Make sure that you provide the legislature with details of how things get done. Be rigorous. Suggestions to the legislature should be specific. Suggestions such as 'end Medicaid' are meaningless. If you have a problem . . . tell the politicians what they have to do to help, tell the legislature what [it must] do, tell the agency heads and the division heads and the field offices—tell them all what they have to do to solve the problem."

In this chapter:

- **Recognizing good ideas that save money**
- **Moving decision making out of headquarters and into the field**
- **Giving workers the tools they need to do their jobs**
- **Enhancing the quality of work life**
- **Considering civil service reform seriously**
- **Building performance partnerships**

In the early phases of NPR, attention focused on putting together the right team, achieving quick victories, and building public and political will. Over the next phase, the reinventors began to focus on NPR's internal audience—the 1.7 million civil servants and 1.5 million military personnel who make government succeed or fail every day. Says Morley Winograd, "We shifted models to more of a partnership and tried to get people to agree that transformation was a good thing and that we weren't focused only on head counts and budget cuts."

This effort was critical. As Bob Stone notes, "Much of the early language of the NPR put off a lot of people. Many people in government saw the talk about reducing staff as an attack on them." Stone says that one of NPR's biggest failures was the way it structured its agency-specific reform efforts—by bringing in federal employees from one agency to assess another. "All of the agencies had people who were rabid for reinvention," he says, "but instead of reaching for them, we brought in outsiders who created an adversarial relationship."

Stone says now that people in every federal agency knew what was needed, but because of the animosity the agency review process created, "it took two or three years to connect with them."

Right from the start, however, NPR staffers tried a variety of strategies to empower frontline employees. Some of the most effective strategies also were the simplest. One was a permission slip, which agency heads presented to federal workers as a wallet-sized card with this message: "Ask yourself: Is it good for my customers? Is it legal and ethical? Is it something I am willing to be accountable for?" The card continues, "If the answers to these questions are yes, don't ask permission. You already have it. Just do it!"

Recognizing Good Ideas That Save Money

An important strategy was recognizing good ideas. The mechanism? A small silver lapel pin called the Hammer Award,[24] which consisted of a $6.00 hammer, a ribbon, and a framed note from the vice president. NPR's leaders understood the value of recognizing employees who were willing to risk suggesting that things could be done differently. For almost six years, the Hammer Award was presented to pioneers who created an "innovative and unique process or program to make government work better and achieve results Americans care about."[25] Nearly 1,400 Hammer Awards were presented to teams of federal employees who were credited with saving the taxpayers more than $53 billion over NPR's lifespan.

By the end of FISCAL YEAR 2002, the combined effects of these initiatives are expected to reduce processing time by 21 PERCENT.

Moving Decision Making Out of Headquarters and Into the Field

By their nature, bureaucracies are centralized. So NPR urged government agencies to delegate, decentralize, and empower employees to make decisions.

One of the best examples of overcentralization came from SSA. After a deluge of complaints from Social Security recipients, the agency decided to analyze its work design. Its findings: The average claim from a disabled American was handled by 26 workers over a span of 155 days; appeals added 17 more workers and 585 more days.[20] The reason? Over the years, agency supervisors had established detailed work processes to ensure that claims would be handled appropriately. The result? The rules deprived frontline employees of discretion. Efficient government often means trusting employees and letting them decide how to handle procedural decisions.

SSA tackled the problem by asking teams of frontline employees, managers, administrative law judges, and labor representatives to design and implement process improvements. These included creating a new workflow model that consolidated prehearing activities, standardizing the use of prehearing conferences, establishing benchmarks for case-processing times, reorganizing hearing offices into self-contained processing groups under a group supervisor, automating data collection, and using video conferencing to reduce travel. By the end of fiscal year 2002, the combined effects of these initiatives are expected to reduce processing time by 21 percent.

A related strategy—advanced by NPR but adopted by few agencies—involved the idea that high-level jobs should be located in Washington, D.C., or other headquarters cities only when there is a practical reason to do so.

Bob Stone puts it bluntly: "Headquarters cuts should have been done by asking frontline employees serving the customers, 'What functions of headquarters are value-added?' GSA [the General Services Administration] did this, and it should have been done elsewhere."

Giving Workers the Tools They Need to Do Their Jobs

At the outset, Vice President Gore held a series of meetings with federal employees in various agencies, asking them what they needed to do their jobs better. He heard stories of waste and frustration. Workers told of not having the basic equipment—such as calculators—they needed to do their jobs. They told about being required to buy obsolete computers at prices that were higher than those in discount stores. They told about being required to fly to distant cities en route to closer ones. Many of these problems were solved. Agencies can now use government credit cards to purchase equipment, such as computers, wherever they find the best prices. Employees can make sensible travel arrangements and charge their tickets the same way private-sector employees do.

At the Excellence in Government 2000 Conference, one reinventor

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was asked how such tools affect his work: "A PC on every desk connects people . . . faster than ever before, changing communications . . . in productive ways."[27]

Enhancing the Quality of Work Life

The introduction to NPR's employee survey suggests that government's "ability to recruit and retain the best employees—and motivate them to be productive—depends on our ability to create a satisfying work environment."[28]

The federal Office of Personnel Management (OPM) created the Family-Friendly Workplace Advocacy Office in 1999 to provide ideas and technical assistance to agencies about comprehensive family-friendly programs. The office has worked to improve the quality of the workplace for government employees by offering flexible work schedules and sites, leave programs, telecommuting, and on-site child development centers.[29]

OPM considers the U.S. Coast Guard a major reinvention success in achieving family-friendly goals. The USCG Quality of Life Program aims to "attain a reasonable balance between the needs of the USCG and the [needs] of its members and their families."[30] Implementing this program required a major shift in the way military personnel were to be treated. For instance, one new policy allowed military members a one-time separation from active duty for up to two years to care for a newborn or adopted child. Other programs focus on relocation assistance and career guidance.

GAO has had similar success. A 1998 recipient of the OPM Director's Award, the agency has worked hard for its 3,500 employees, who now enjoy more liberal leave policies (six months for maternity and paternity leave, in addition to the annual one-month leave), accredited on-site child care, and regular meetings of managers and employees. The agency even built an employee fitness center.[31]

Another interesting result of the employee survey was that employees in agencies in which reinvention was a priority liked their jobs better than did other federal workers. OPM reported in 2000 that 84 percent of employees in agencies where reinvention was emphasized were satisfied with their jobs. This figure compared with 63 percent among employees across all government agencies and 37 percent among employees who reported that reinvention was not a priority in their organizations.[32]

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Considering Civil Service Reform Seriously

Observers and NPR insiders agree that one important task left undone is civil service reform. America has not seen a major overhaul of the civil service system for more than 20 years. In 1978, the Civil Service Reform Act substantially changed government. It established the Senior Executive Service and strengthened federal employees' organizing and collective bargaining rights. Since then, other changes, such as allowing agencies to do some of their own hiring rather than working through OPM, have decentralized the system somewhat.

But federal employees and the unions that represent them have resisted civil service reform. This statement, from a supervisor at the Treasury Department in response to an employee survey, captures the essence of their argument: "The federal civil service is a formidable power for stability. It is fairly cheap, easily managed, and will not revolt. It takes up the many difficult assignments given it, and successfully carries out the orders of the Congress. It accepts the blame for many sins of the electorate and remains quiet when wrongly assailed. It is upgrading the processes of government without asking for much recognition. Why do you want to reinvent it?"

As Bob Stone points out, "We made changes in civil service procedures, but not in the law. So the system hasn't changed. Not getting legislation . . . was a failing." One result of NPR was the creation of National Partnership Councils, which included major unions and employee organizations. The Bush administration, however, announced plans in early 2001 to abolish these councils.

At NPR's outset, the labor unions agreed to consider reinvention as long as they had a seat at the table and full participation in decisions about how work was going to change and who was going to do the work. As leadership in some of the unions changed, so did attitudes toward systems changes that would affect pay and threaten job security. And when organized labor began to insist that the systems changes proposed by NPR didn't protect their members, says Stone, the Clinton administration decided not to challenge the unions.

Although federal efforts to reform the civil service system failed, Stone says the states "ought to tackle civil service reform. And where unions are strong, they should [collaborate with them]. It's worth having a modern personnel system; you need to be able to fire the small number of bad performers. If you don't fire them, it's corrosive of morale elsewhere."

Building Performance Partnerships

Government officials at all levels struggle to maintain a focus on results that are important to customers, and they should work to make government agencies more accountable—without burdening grantees and partners with paperwork. Loosening restrictions and requirements can mean that a program might not meet its goals; tightening restrictions risks suffocating creativity and entrepreneurship. What NPR called

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR DESIGNING A PERFORMANCE PARTNERSHIP

NPR suggests following these 11 principles:[13]

1. PROGRAM CONSOLIDATIONS
   Every effort should be made to merge funding streams that force recipients to wastefully isolate administration and delivery of one program from another to avoid being penalized by auditors.
2. PARTNERSHIP
   Federal, state, and local partners should jointly design the partnership and the strategies to implement it.
3. INCREASED FLEXIBILITY
   Partnerships should promote multiple approaches to meeting national objectives, minimize "required" service requirements, and provide multiple-year funding.
4. IMPROVED ACCOUNTABILITY
   Partners should develop, communicate, and monitor measurable program goals and report progress.
5. PERFORMANCE MEASURES
   Partnerships should be structured, managed, and evaluated on the basis of results. Performance measures typically include a mix of outcome and output measures.
6. PERFORMANCE INCENTIVES
   Partners should be recognized and rewarded for success—both high performance and improved performance.
7. SHIFT THE FOCUS OF DECISION MAKING
   Partners should decide largely on the "what" and leave most of the "how" to states and localities.
8. SIMPLIFY ADMINISTRATION
   Partnerships should reduce federal regulation of inputs, avoid micromanagement, and eliminate wasteful paperwork.
9. ADMINISTRATIVE SAVINGS
   Savings should be realized through consolidation and through program and administrative simplification.
10. IMPLEMENTATION
    Proposals should consider shifting toward performance partnerships with self-selected or "volunteer" states and local partners who are ready.
11. ENTITLEMENT PROGRAMS
    Partnerships for entitlement programs might initially allocate funds to states to match what they currently receive.

"performance partnerships" attempt to solve this dilemma; they provide program flexibility in exchange for increased accountability for performance.[14]

Over the years, NPR has developed performance partnerships to focus on various issues. The way these partnerships are structured, however, has evolved over time. The first was the Oregon Option. This effort began when Oregon officials proposed using community-developed benchmarks—such as improved reading scores for children, cleaner rivers, and increased adult literacy—to measure progress. State and local officials suggested that federal officials put faith in state and local decisions, grant waivers from some federal regulations, and allow more flexibility in spending federal money. This new system is credited with eliminating many federally imposed barriers that kept frontline workers from doing their

jobs. It also is achieving significant progress in meeting some of Oregon's community-developed benchmarks.

The partnership formula is simple: Form a team (by collaborating with federal, state, and local partners). Increase flexibility (by consolidating funding streams, eliminating micromanagement, and reducing paperwork). And demand performance (by setting clear, measurable goals and creating financial incentives).

For NPR, performance partnerships worked when the federal government delivered services at the state or local level. Take federal workforce investment initiatives: Answering the demands of the changing American economy, NPR created the 21st Century Skills Network. The partnership, based at www.skillsnetwork.gov, allows "community-based organizations to learn from each other as they help American workers and their families gain the skills, tools, and knowledge needed to succeed in the 21st Century economy."[15]

In all, 13 agencies across the country—including the Florida Broward Alliance and the New York Broome-Tioga Workforce Development Board—collaborate with federal officials. The network has clear goals—like helping more workers move into high-skill, high-wage jobs—and increasing flexibility. Its website provides best practices, significant issues, government resources and effective strategies for preparing American workers for the new economy.

A performance partnership such as the 21st Century Skills Network can respond to the problems typical of government grant systems. Grant systems, as NPR notes, often have "too many funding categories, suffocating regulations and paperwork, misdirected emphasis on remediating rather than preventing problems, and no clear focus on measurable outcomes." Performance partnerships can give programs more flexibility while holding them accountable for achieving desirable outcomes.[16]

Johnson says that although the federal-state-local model produced some worthwhile results, the community-to-community model, which evolved from those first efforts, shows even more promise. One of the best examples is the SafeCities Network, www.safecities.gov, which seeks to reduce gun violence.[17]

In this effort, explains Johnson, "The federal government played a different role. The federal government was catalyst and facilitator." With federal help, communities that face similar problems—such as with gun violence or with the need for high-quality after-school programs—share insights and lessons with each other.

MOVING TO BALANCED MEASURES

In the early years of NPR, reinvention efforts were evaluated by measuring customer satisfaction. But as the effort continued, NPR worked to create a management strategy called "balanced measures." Morley Winograd says he had learned from his own experiences in the private sector that the simple process of getting feedback from customers and employees could radically transform the workplace.

The premise is straightforward: For agencies to be effective and efficient, they must look at their work from the perspective of employee and customer, as well as in relation to the agency's business or mission. The balanced-measures approach, NPR officials have pointed out, solidifies an organization's focus on success by setting objectives and measuring performance from distinct perspectives."[38] Government agencies need to see three parts as a whole: fulfilling the agency's mission, meeting customer needs, and meeting employee needs.

Early on in the reinvention effort, the federal government focused mostly on customer satisfaction. But as Beverly Godwin notes, "Nobody has satisfied customers without satisfied employees. You can't leave anything out."

Pamela Johnson adds that surveying frontline workers can lead to quick changes. For example, a Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) survey showed that its employees had some of the lowest morale in government, and HCFA identified lack of recognition for good work as one problem. When the agency remedied that problem, morale improved dramatically. Did HCFA fix every problem identified in the survey? No. But Johnson says this: "Acting on something was more important than acting on everything."

In partnership with OPM, NPR sponsored a government-wide survey of federal employees in 1998, 1999, and 2000. From the survey, NPR learned that employees appreciated family-friendly work policies, they thought more cooperation between labor and management was needed, and they had come to recognize customer service as part of the job. NPR encouraged agencies to implement performance management strategies and improve labor-management relations.

For the final aspect of the balanced-measures strategy, NPR pushed agencies to consider the perspective of business; one that "focuses on outcomes and business processes needed for organizational efficiency and effectiveness."[39]

In *Balancing Measures,* NPR staffers wrote, "though the bottom line for public agencies is often murky, government can still analyze outcomes on some level."[40] Specifically, NPR suggested that agencies "ask themselves the following questions when considering the overall organizational processes: How do you want customers to view you? Are your measures result-based? Are the results something that customers care about?"[41]

Several federal agencies, including IRS, the Veterans Benefits Administration, the National Security Agency, and the U.S. Postal Service, have implemented

Research showed that EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS are strongly linked to BUSINESS RESULTS.

the balanced-measures approach.[42] For instance, IRS now measures achievement in ways appropriate to each goal. It uses customer satisfaction surveys from a sample of taxpayers. These business results will be measured by a combination of case and service quality and neutral quantities, such as number and mix of cases handled. This contrasts sharply with the old—and controversial—practice of using dollars collected from tax enforcement as the main quantitative measure.

Employee satisfaction is also gauged through surveys. Because research showed that "employee perceptions are strongly linked to business results,"[43] IRS is gathering employee perceptions on topics such as quality and customer focus, resources and support training, labor and management relations, management communications, and ethics.

In one regional office of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the three-pronged measurement system is well under way and already shows results. Joseph Thompson, then-New York regional office director, began in 1994 by having the staff members who determine whether veterans are eligible for benefits go to nearby veterans' hospitals to meet their customers face to face. As a team, those employees developed a change in the way benefits are determined from 23 sequential steps to a process that was run by small teams serving specific beneficiaries.

The new eight-step process produced better business results: It yielded savings of 20 percent in processing costs and has cut the waiting time for veterans who want to see a claims counselor from half an hour to three minutes. The other results are measurable too. The veterans like it better because they deal with people they know from the beginning to the end of the process. And employees like it better because they can see their work through from beginning to end rather than toiling away at an isolated fragment of a disconnected whole.

BENCHMARKING STUDIES

In this chapter:

- **Employee work groups and surveys**
- **Performance measures**
- **One-stop customer service**

The first summit of business leaders was held in Philadelphia in June 1993. In September, President Clinton signed Executive Order 12862, requiring agencies to "identify their customers, ask them what they want, and then set standards equal to or better than the best in business."[44]

The executive order prompted another conference between private-sector executives and government workers. At the second meeting, convened in Hunt Valley, Maryland, later that year, government officials welcomed lessons about customer service and employee empowerment. They learned how the president of Walt Disney Attractions once dressed up as Mickey Mouse to learn firsthand about his customers—and how the CEO of Johnsonville Foods let production workers decide whether sausage tasted good enough to ship. And they learned how large, customer-focused companies use benchmarking studies.[45]

From the first summit in Philadelphia, NPR recognized the value of learning from the private sector in a series of benchmarking studies, which "compare and measure the policies, practices, philosophies, and performance measures of an organization against those of high-performing organizations anywhere in the world."[46]

The first NPR study focused on telephone service. Why? Because, as the 1995 NPR report *Serving the American Public: Best Practices in Telephone Service* noted, "Americans talk to their government in great numbers."[47] On a single day in January 1995, Americans placed 1.7 million calls to SSA. In 1994, IRS received 68.7 million calls and INS received some 12 million calls for service and information.

When the report compared government telephone service with the private sector, the government fared poorly. Whereas 25 percent of callers to government agencies were likely to give up without getting a response, fewer than 2 percent of callers to America's best-run telephone service centers—such as USAA Insurance, Citibank, and Saturn Corporation—did. "Slow responses and busy signals are too often the rule in the public sector, whereas world class organizations answer in less than 15-20 seconds and rarely allow busy signals."[48]

Helping government agencies improve their service was simply a matter of detailing the strategies that the best companies use to give callers quick and effective service. One example: Private companies make sure employees don't make errors by avoiding the use of coded information; a telephone customer service representative at an insurance company wouldn't enter #23 to change a customer's marital status or #46 to add a beneficiary to an account. The private sector avoids potential mistakes by providing plain-text menu choices and icons for customer service representatives.

Some private-sector businesses now use SSA'S CALL CENTER as a SERVICE BENCHMARK.

SSA, IRS, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) all used the study results to improve operation. IRS introduced around-the-clock telephone service during tax season. SSA raised its performance on accuracy and timeliness of responses. And CPSC strengthened its call center's operations. One unanticipated benefit? Some private-sector businesses have returned the compliment and now use SSA's call center as a service benchmark.

In time, NPR produced a series of benchmarking studies on downsizing, strategic planning, and performance measurement. These studies, still available online, can provide a useful resource for state and local governments.[49]

Employee Work Groups and Surveys

In one 2000 study on workforce diversity,[50] NPR and the Department of Commerce used a simple benchmarking approach. The study team initially conducted telephone surveys, found which companies were the best in the business, and then conducted on-site visits to learn the best practices in achieving diversity.

The telephone survey analyzed several aspects of employee diversity: whether the organization had a diversity strategy and budget, how many staff members were dedicated to diversity, and who was accountable for maintaining it. After calculating a point-weighted scorecard, the study team narrowed the study to nine organizations: Coors Brewing Company, Daimler Chrysler, Eastman Kodak, Fannie Mae, Prudential Insurance, the Seattle *Times*, Sempra Energy, the U.S. Coast Guard, and Xerox Corporation.

Using a phone survey to find the best in the business in workforce diversity was an effective way to begin. The study team made several critical findings: "Organizations benefit from diversity. Leaders and managers are responsible for diversity. Leaders and managers must create a strategic plan to develop diversity initiatives throughout the organization. Employees' views and involvement are key to the success of diversity initiatives."[51]

Old-fashioned surveys and employee work groups often work equally well, and they can be relatively inexpensive. In 1996, when NPR launched a benchmarking study on customer complaint systems, the agency decided simply to *talk* to teams of government workers. No sophisticated surveys or data analysis, just roundtable discussion. Workers spoke about training programs, personnel systems, and strategic plans. They compared what worked with what didn't, and they set out a plan to make their agencies as good as or better than the best in the business of resolving customer complaints.

By benchmarking, participants found that the best companies used similar approaches in handling complaints. The best train frontline employees to resolve complaints during the first contact, and they make it easy for customers to complain through customer helplines and comment cards at the points of service.

BENCHMARKING STUDY RESULTS ON CUSTOMER COMPLAINT SYSTEMS[52]

- Make it easy for your customers to complain and your customers will make it easy for you to improve.
  The best use feedback from calls to toll-free numbers, letters, and surveys to improve their work processes.
- Respond to complaints quickly and courteously with common sense and you will improve customer loyalty.
  Toyota's formula for customer satisfaction: Doing the job right the first time + effective complaint management = maximum customer confidence and loyalty.
- Resolve complaints on the first contact, save money by eliminating unnecessary additional contacts that escalate costs, and build customer confidence.
  NPR research shows that resolving a complaint on the first contact reduces costs by at least 50 percent.
- Technology is critical for complaint-handling systems.
  The best compile customer complaint information electronically, then present it to everyone, including management.
- Recruit and hire the best for customer service jobs.
  Some organizations even build a customer-service position into a formal career ladder for advancement in the company.

After gaining such useful insights, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and the U.S. Customs Service improved their own complaint processes. The Patent and Trademark Office created customer assistance centers, and the Customs Service retrained its representatives and created an automated complaint-tracking system.

Performance Measures

NPR also used benchmarking to determine best practices in creating balanced measures—the process of assessing progress toward meeting organizational goals. This time NPR looked beyond national borders for best practices, convening a team of representatives from U.S. federal agencies, Canadian government agencies, United Kingdom government agencies, and local governments in the United States. NPR paid particularly close attention to Canada because its government had already instituted a strategic, multiyear planning initiative for expenditure management.

The inter-governmental benchmarking team identified 100 best-in-class organizations that have mature performance measurement systems in place and that use these systems to drive continuous improvement. From this list, the benchmarking team chose 32 study partners, who helped develop a set of best practices for performance measurement. Among the findings: Senior executives and managers must be consistently involved in implementing performance measurement systems; effective internal and external communication is crucial; and performance measurement systems should be positive, not punitive.

The results of that benchmarking study, for example, led OPM to change the Senior Executive Service's performance management system to require that employees' job performance evaluations be rated on a series of factors, including customer satisfaction, employee feedback, and progress in accomplishing their agencies' missions. The one-stop customer service benchmarking report helped pave the way for the

INTERACTIVE KIOSKS

In July 2000 NPR introduced the "interactive kiosk" to a neighborhood in Washington, D.C. The kiosk allows individuals access by touch screen to more than 150 local, state, and federal government services. The kiosks are user-friendly. Government information is sorted by topic: citizenship, elected officials, taxes, and voter registration.

Interactive kiosks were placed in shopping malls, grocery stores, and public transit centers across the country through a joint effort of NPR, GSA, and Urban Cool and GS Planet, two private-sector companies. The kiosks target underserved communities where home computers are rare and Internet access is limited.

The project stems from NPR's Hassle-Free Communities initiative, which works for "seamless government service, eliminating barriers between local, state, and federal government."[56]

Hassle-Free Communities initiative and interactive kiosks."[55]

One-Stop Customer Service

One of the most popular reinvention techniques is the one-stop: an office where customers can transact all of their business in a single contact, whether by phone, fax, on the Internet, or in person. As NPR described it, "One-stop customers do not have to hunt around, call back, or repeatedly explain their situation. One-stop customer service is convenient, accessible, and personalized."[56] And that service can assume diverse forms. It can mean that repeat customers have a single point of contact in the organization; that employees answering the phone know exactly where to refer callers for more information; or that federal, state, and local agencies are located under one roof.

NPR convened a benchmarking team to study best practices in one-stop customer service, highlighting the work of private sector as well as government agencies." The team's report featured information on the Ford Motor Company, but it also described on how the Trade Information Center of the U.S. Department of Commerce coordinates the services of 19 agencies.

The Hassle-Free Communities initiative even put government agencies on the road. IRS sent federal employees out on buses to rural communities in Kansas and Missouri, where few federal government offices exist, to help taxpayers get tax forms and advice on filling them out.

In East Dallas, Texas, INS opened a kiosk—complete with information in several languages about federal government services. The kiosk provides information and forms for INS transactions and for about 50 other categories of government benefits and services. The kiosk also provides local and state information, and users can get federal passport applications or state driver's license change-of-address forms.

As a June 2000 story in the Dallas *Morning News* noted, "There, across the aisle from a mountain of watermelons and a few steps from the *gorditas* and *pan dulce* counters, the federal government got closer to the people."[57]

In this chapter:

- **Government online, not in line**
- **User-friendly interfaces**
- **Internet applications**
- **Using the power of place to build support for change**

In 1993, the federal government had about 50 websites; in 2000, there were about 10,000.

Because NPR's history coincided with the explosive growth of the Internet, it was possible to think about serving the American public in entirely new ways. By the end of 2000, the federal government expected nearly 40 million Americans to be transacting business with the government electronically. And as NPR's website noted, it was time for government to put people "online, not in line."

NPR veterans Kamensky and Godwin suggest that information technology can transform government by delivering information to citizens, by allowing citizens to complete government transactions online, by tracking and reporting results of government efforts, and by engaging citizens and encouraging their involvement with government. Indeed, these first three changes are already well under way, and the last one—helping citizens engage more with government—is just beginning to occur.

Government Online, Not In Line

When NPR took its customer-focused philosophy to the Internet, says Johnson, agencies were discouraged from building sites that looked like their office directories and encouraged to develop customer-focused portals, such as www.statelocal.gov and www.seniors.gov.

Says Johnson, "This is an important lesson for state and local government. The Internet gives them a chance to break down the stovepipes that separate agencies and programs and make it much easier for citizens to find the services and information they need."

NPR created the Government Information Technology Services Working Group, and a cross-cutting strategy resulted. NPR helped develop Internet portals that group government websites according to the types of consumers who use the sites. For instance, the Access America for Students website[38] offers links to government websites about education, student loans, military service, career planning, travel and leisure, and the legislative process. NPR helped develop similar portals for senior citizens, small businesses, and workers.

User-Friendly Interfaces

The welcome message on the FirstGov website shows clearly why the site is so useful: "Most of the information you can find here has been on the Internet for a long time, but if you didn't know what you were looking for, or where to look, you couldn't find the answer to your question."[39]

FirstGov gives the American public—and the global community—free access to a wealth of U.S. government information. Visitors to the site can find links to information by choosing from among broad categories. For

NPR staffers worked to FORMAT SOME PAPERWORK into applications that are WIDELY ACCEPTED across the Internet.

example, someone looking for student loans need not know that the Office of Student Financial Assistance Programs is located in the Department of Education. A citizen who needs an IRS form doesn't need to find the IRS site; one click at FirstGov links a user to www.FedForms.gov, a one-stop site for the top 500 forms for government services.

NPR also encouraged agencies to update federal government websites to make them user-friendly. As a result, www.hhs.gov and other agency websites have seen major improvements in clarity and visual appeal. And Americans have taken notice. In September 2000, the Council in Excellence in Government released a Hart-Teeter survey showing that 66 percent of U.S. Internet users have visited at least one government website, and 71 percent of those who visit rate the site quality as good or excellent.[60]

NPR's "e-government" project also included making sure websites were up to date so government forms would be available online. For example, NPR staffers worked to format some paperwork—like government procurement applications—into applications that are widely accepted across the Internet.

Internet Applications

NPR also helped agencies develop new Internet-based services that allow customers and businesses to interact with the government electronically rather than on the phone, by mail, or in person. GSA's auction site, www.gsaauctions.gov, is one of these Internet-based applications: It's a website for auctioning surplus government equipment, such as computers and furniture. The government once sold most of its surplus property at live auctions, but the new site allows businesses and consumers to bid electronically for goods all over the country. The new system also increases efficiency by letting contractors compete for government business, thus saving procurement costs.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), uses the Internet to sell real estate.[61] In May 2000, HUD put its Dollar Homes Initiative on the Internet to sell local governments single-family homes acquired by HUD foreclosure. The object is to help create housing for needy families and help revitalize neighborhoods. And private citizens can find out where available properties are and how to purchase them at another HUD website, www.hud.gov/homes. The Internet has helped HUD and its contractors sell hundreds of homes.

During its collection of data for Census 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau posted daily updates on the rates at which people were mailing back their forms.[62] Response rates were tabulated by state, county, city, and town. State and local policymakers were eager for high response rates because census data are used to apportion seats in Congress and to distribute government funds for some programs. Making those data available so quickly created positive competition among state and local governments, who immediately took steps to get citizens to respond. Census officials suggest that the return-mail response helped make Census 2000

more accurate than it otherwise could have been. The effort also saved taxpayer money because fewer door-to-door census takers were needed.

Using the Power of Place to Build Support for Change

Another powerful tool for engaging political leaders and citizens is using what reinventors call "the power of place." Johnson notes that providing place-specific information can engage citizens in a powerful way: "People care about where they live; they care about the quality of their schools and the safety of their neighborhoods; they care about the quality of their local medical centers."

Beginning in 1998, NPR promoted the use of information that is integrated and linked to geography to support government reinvention. In addition to encouraging traditional uses of this information in environmental and natural resources programs, NPR focused on new uses: to reduce crime, promote public safety, support smart growth, and provide information and services for the public. A geographic information system (GIS) provides such information.[64] A GIS is a spatial information system that builds data sets that cover specific geographic areas. By integrating geographic and other data, such as population or income distribution, it allows people to search for trends—in public safety statistics or the percentage of children covered by health insurance, for example—in specific places.

One highly successful effort was called Mapping Out Crime.[64] It described practical examples of how police departments could use crime mapping, and it produced a new software series for police departments and prosecutors, including the "Community Policing Beat Book," which helps frontline officers generate and personalize maps on laptop computers in their squad cars.[65]

A series of community demonstration projects showed the power of integrating federal, state, and local data and giving this information to citizens for local planning.[66] For example, Tillamook County, Oregon, used a GIS to pinpoint neighborhoods and communities most vulnerable to flooding—and then decided to elevate 55 houses and 14 buildings that were at risk of serious damage.[67] When the flood came in 1998, local officials estimated that GIS-inspired planning had spared them more than $50 million in damage.[68]

GIS also fueled NPR's Boost 4 Kids initiative.[69] The system helped communities ascertain where young people do not have access to activities, such as sports, tutoring, or after-school programs. Boost 4 Kids worked with 10 communities to improve the well-being of children by linking them to such activities.

Another powerful tool for engaging political leaders and citizens is using what reinventors call THE POWER OF PLACE. People care about where they live; they care about the QUALITY of their schools and the SAFETY of their neighborhoods; they care about the quality of their local medical centers.

The potential for improving state and local government through GIS is enormous, and agencies on all levels could benefit. Health service agencies could compare the quality of local nursing homes, environmental agencies could rate different communities' air quality, and police departments could use real-time data to reduce crime and increase public safety.

Many states and communities already use similar strategies to build public will for important reforms. In Georgia, the GIS Data Clearinghouse collects, documents, formats, and publishes GIS data collected by agencies of the Georgia state government.[6] And in Michigan, Inner City Mappers—an innovative summer youth employment program—uses a GIS mapping system to help inner-city youth find employment and serve their communities at the same time.[7]

CONCLUSION

From the beginning, NPR's efforts were inspired and informed by reinvention efforts in states and communities. More than eight years later, the stories and lessons of NPR offer a similar opportunity for states and communities. Whether those other units of government are just beginning to contemplate reinvention or are continuing efforts begun years ago, they can learn from NPR's successes as well as from its failures.

This report provides only a brief introduction to the five main aspects of reinvention. It offers just a glimpse of how NPR's leaders built political and public support. It sketches a handful of effective strategies that NPR's staff used to persuade federal employees of the serious intention to make government work better—and to engage frontline workers in the task.

The report briefly describes the transformative effects of measuring customer and employee satisfaction and business results. It describes how the federal government used the private-sector technique of benchmarking to improve some of its processes. Finally, it offers few practical ideas for using information technology to build stronger connections between citizens and government.

But this report is meant only to serve as an introduction for readers who want to learn more about federal reinvention. NPR's archives, the publications, and the Internet sites listed on the following pages provide a wealth of information about the efforts discussed here.

- 21st Century Skills Network: www.skillsnetwork.gov.
- After School Initiative: www.afterschool.gov.
- Access America for Exporters: www.tradenet.gov.
- Access America & E-Gov E-zine: www.accessamerica.gov.
- Acquisition Reform Network: www.arnet.gov.
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- Federal Geographic Data Committee: www.fgdc.gov.
- Federal Government Customer Survey: www.customerservice.gov.
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- U.S. Blue Pages Online Directory of the U.S. Government: www.bluepages.gov.
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- Pricewaterhouse Coopers Endowment for the Business of Government: www.endowment.pwcglobal.com.
- Recreational Opportunities on Federal Lands: www.recreation.gov.
- Reinventing Government E-zine: http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/npr/rego/index.htm.
- SafeCities: www.safecities.gov.
- U.S. Business Advisor: www.business.gov.
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